

Blood and Ashes

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Summary: Throughout the Halo series, you can hear lines stolen from the movie 'ALIENS'. So now, the chief, the covenant, and even flood are going to see what they're truly made of...RR

1. Prolouge

1Slowly, the disorientation passed. Private Mendez yawned and rubbed his eyes, fighting the impulse to roll over, hit a switch, and return to cryo-sleep. As his senses gradually became more aware, he realized something was different about the bay. Other people were milling about, in combat armor, and carrying rifles. His senses slowly translated the scene before his eyes, and he pushed himself out of the tank, stumbling. A technician ran towards him, and nearly knocked him over when he clasped a hand on his shoulder, shoving a pile of things into his chest. "Rise and shine sir, we've got probblems!" he said, a hint of fear in his voice and the loaded pistol in a leg holster obvious signs that something was definitely amiss.

Mendez examined what he had been given - his combat gear, including pants, boots, shirts, and smaller armor pieces for his shins, forearms, thighs, and elbows. He stood dazed no more, and moved his legs. People were shouting orders everywhere, marines were running about half dressed, combat dressed, or with dressed wounds that looked rather nasty. Mendez guessed they had been boarded, or were in the process of boarding an enemy vessel. He strolled into the hallway, tugging on his pants, the cold metals of the floor sending a chill through his feet as he walked into the more empty hall. One marine was standing guard by a door nervously, his battle rifle looking like it had been fired quite a bit, the barrel completely black.

Mendez, or 'Cutter' as he was called by his squad, quickly got the rest of his uniform and armor plating on, and went to the sentry. "Hey, you ok? What's going on here?" he asked. The soldier blinked and seemed to digest his words for a moment before he replied. "Ah, yeah, ahhhh...you see, we found...ah, that is, a ship. A covenant

ship. Its uh...on the uh, ground, planet, yeah, uh...well, yeah. But it had no covenants on it...they're...so fast...so...sneaky...I don't understand...anyway, look, uh...get to an armory, then find an officer...ah...they'll ah, tell you where to, uh, go that is, ah, if you, ah-uh, think you can take it, uh, yeah. Through here?" he stammered in what sounded like a massive lack of mental stability. Mendez just nodded and trotted down the corridor. He detected no signs of small arms fire, there were no vibrations through the hull, no sounds, no orders over the intercom, and nothing out of the ordinary.

Finally, he came to a lift, where a man with a sergeant's stripes was holding the door. Mendez waved and ran into the lift just as it began ascending. "Excuse me sir, mind telling me whats going on here?" he asked. "Son, I don't think any of us really know whats going on. All we know is they're big, they're not covenant, they're not flood, but they're certianly bad ass. Even when you kill em' they still got you. Evil mothers have blood that works exactly like acid, eats right through anything. If you havn't been yet, stay sharp. We can't let them get in." he said. Mendez had nothing to say in response as he tried to decide what kind of creatures they were fighting, and why they couldn't retreat. If it wasn't a covenant vessel, then what could it be?

The lift deposited Mendez and the Sergeant on an upper level. The higher ranked soldier wished Mendez good luck, and ran off, shouting for his squad to sound off. Mendez stepped forward, and began looking for his own unit, which he found in the upper right corner of the room, going through a weapons check. As soon as he stepped up, he was tossed an armor plate. Mendez instinctivly put it on. "Mendez, glad you're here. We need every man we can get, have you been briefed?" the sarge asked. Mendez muttered something under his breath before responding. "Slightly, I know its not covenant, and apparently whatever it is 'bleeds acid' or something like that. Whats the deal?" he asked. "Alright listen up, all of you, we're goin over this one more time. Watch the monitor!" the sarge ordered, pressing a button on a nearby mounted wall screen, that promptly lit up, showing Mendez what could only be described as a nightmare's monster.

It was tall, about 7 feet, maybe more. Its body was completely covered by a black carapace, it had massive teeth on a long head that ended in a snout, but no eyes, no ears, no nose to speak of. Claws on both 5 digit hands, talons on the feet, and a long tail with a nasty looking stinger on the end. The mere look of the beast send a chill down Mendez's spine. "This is it, unknown species, so for now we're just calling them aliens, enemies, targets, whatever fits. As you can tell, they got no eyes, nose, or ears, but they can hear, see, and smell you. They're fast as hell, strong as hell, and clever as hell. They bleed acid, so check your target isn't right on you or your fellow marines before you fire. Use short controlled bursts, and they go down, don't step over em' or you'll probably end up falling through the floor" he said. Mendez was speechless, but someone handed him an MA-5B assault rifle and he automatically cycled the bolt.

"Alright, settle down, I'm not done yet Mendez!" the sarge snapped. Mendez blinked and managed to stutter, "Uh, yes sir, sorry sir."

The sarge pressed another button and something that looked like a cross between a spider, a skeleton of a human hand, and a horseshoe

crab appeared on the screen. It had a pale cream color to its skin, and a long tail that looked like a crocodiles but was clearly not. "Now these are small, but even worse. They pop out of nowhere and hook onto your face. Apparently, if they get you, you turn into one of those other ones, or you give birth, or something. I don't know to be honest, but I know this. If it isn't human, back up and keep shooting. They don't use weapons, but from the way they fight, they don't need them. We go in in five ladies, lets pack it up!" the sarge said. Mendez stood still, digesting the massive amount of information he had just been given, then finally moved as the rest of his squad began checking weapons and grabbing ammo.

Mendez collected a standard 5 spare magazines for his rifle, and watched jealously as other soldiers with newer battle rifles inspected their weapons. Time blurred into nothing, and he seemed to be in fast forward, everyone moving about until the sarge called for them to assemble. They went to the hanger, they got into the drop ships, they blasted off into space.

All that seemed like another typical mission. But Mendez had this feeling, this instinct in his gut, telling him that something was very wrong with where they were going, and especially with what they were fighting. In reality, they hadn't even been given mission objectives, at least not yet. The drop ship began to shake as it entered the planets atmosphere. Another interesting point, they hadn't even been told where they were. But then again, they were just grunts, why should it matter? However, just as he was about to dismiss it all, the tiny heads up display over his left eye flashed to get his attention, and a small briefing came scrolling up. ****ATTENTION - MEDICAL RESEARCH FACILITY ON PLANET BELOW COMPLETELY OVERRUN BY UNKNOWN ORGANISMS. POSSIBLE COVENANT INVOLVEMENT. MISSION OBJECTIVES AS FOLLOWS:****

****1. SECURE THE COMMAND CENTER OF THE FACILITY****

****2. RETRIEVE OR DESTROY COMPLEX AI SYSTEM****

****3. ALL OTHER PRIORITIES ARE SECONDARY TO OBJECTIVE 2****

Private Reese chuckled. "Hey boys, check it out! We're cannon fodder!" he laughed. Mendez smirked. It was unlikely, considering their unit, along with four other drop ships full of marines were setting down. The pilot came on over the intercom out of nowhere, startling the marine when he said. "Clear of the atmosphere, lowering rear hatch."

Mendez turned to look as the hatch slowly slid open and the noise from the engines and wind speed doubled. The world was made of ice. An endless tundra stretched below for what seemed to be forever. "We're coming over the complex now, we've got the south landing field. Other teams will land at north, east, and west fields, all teams will converge on the command center and retrieve the AI. We land in twenty seconds ladies, look sharp!" The sarge followed up. Mendez waited until the drop ship hit the ground, then leapt from the platform to the ground, the sarge shouting "GO GO GO!"

The marines moved like crazy for the obvious location, a large open loading bay. Mendez was appalled at the state of it. There was damage to just about everything, what appeared to be hits from pistols and maybe some sub-machine guns. There were various patches of the ground

burned away as well. Mendez shivered in the cold and kept moving as the marines rapidly swept the loading bay. Nothing moved. "Area sec..." Mendez started to say when he heard the weapons fire, coming from the south. The sarge put his hand to his radio on his helmet. "Second squad, come in, what's going on?" he shouted. The link came back immediately to a terrified voice. "They're kshhhhhhhhhhhhhh from the roof! Kshhhhhhhh overrun! Fall Kshhhhhhhhhh Fallback to the kshhhhhhhhhhhh ship!" said a panicked marine, the sounds of battle rifles and assault rifles firing, and some sort of horrible scream coming through. "Alright marines, get inside, lets go! Double time it to the command center!" the sarge ordered. The marines responded instantly, and began running. The point man, a huge guy named Jackson, crashed through the only door into the interior of the building with his shoulder. He burst inside, and the corridor was in the same condition as the rest of the loading bay. Bullet holes, melted metal, bodies everywhere. Interestingly enough, only alien bodies. But there was no time to satisfy curiosity as they ran as fast as they could.

A small beep went off on every marines movement tracker at once, and gradually, the blip got larger. "Behind us! Closing fast!" Mendez shouted. The 12 men kept running, deciding to deal with any attackers when they got to the command center. "Distance to objective is twenty meters, hostile at 30 meters, keep moving!" the sarge shouted. But there was something in his voice, that tiny droplet of fear. But not fear of the unknown, it sounded like a fear of what was going to happen. Mendez was brave, but THAT scared him. "There it is, Jackson, get us in, marines, cover Jackson!" the sarge yelled. Jackson slammed into the door and began tearing out the locking circuitry. The other 11 men spun around, and readied themselves. Mendez checked his MA-5B assault rifle was ready, and cycled the bolt. The ammo counter read 60, and the barrel was clean and cool. Then he saw it, the monsters he had seen in the briefing. "OPEN FIRE!" the sarge yelled. Mendez's finger squeezed the trigger, and a burst of 10mm slugs ripped into the first alien. It yelled as it was blown apart, its blood spraying onto the wall...and just as the briefing had said, the green blood was highly acidic, and began to melt the bulkhead. Dozens of aliens began appearing from the corridor, air shafts, and even gratings in the floor. Mendez kept firing, short, controlled bursts, his fellow marines shooting as well, their battle rifles spitting hot lead fists to punch into their target's hideous maws. Blood spewed, but the aliens still came. "Jackson! Get that door open!" Mendez shouted as he clipped an alien in the arm with a burst of fire, following up with a few rounds to the head structure.

Jackson struggled with the circuitry, trying to fight the instinct to turn around and add his rifle's ammunition to the fray. But it just wouldn't open, finally, in frustration, he slammed his fist into the panel. To his surprise, the door whipped open. To his even further surprise, a large black shape was blocking the door...

Mendez turned briefly and saw an alien rip Jackson apart. "BEHIND US!" he yelled, spinning and firing. The heavy rounds blew the alien apart as Jackson screamed from a brutal claw wound. But then the blood from the creature sprayed onto his face and eyes, and he went down howling in agony. There was no hope for him, and no hope for anyone. "Get out of here, RUN!" someone yelled. The sarge seconded that, with a cry of, "Regroup at the landing field, fall back marines, fall back!"

But for Mendez, there was no time to fall back and regroup, there was only time to come face to face with death. An alien leapt from an air duct, then leapt again, straight at Mendez, who half countered, half dodged, by turning his shoulder into the thing as he attempted to spin out of the way. The result was the two went skidding into the command center, the doors automatically sealing as the two passed in. The alien was rolled off him, and Mendez slammed into a console, stunned. But adrenaline soon kicked in, and he leapt to his feet, pulling his sidearm, seeing as the tackle had sent his rifle flying into another corner. The alien hissed and charged. Mendez leapt sideways and fired, amazed at the brutal speed of the creature, noticing the chatter of rifle fire rapidly fading away. His shot smacked into the alien's right arm, but didn't slow it down in the slightest. The beast skidded to a halt next to the door, and turned to face him, but Mendez was ready. His finger slammed into the trigger twice, and two rounds blew large chunks of the creature's head apart, causing it to fall down, dead. The blood from the being began to melt the floor, but also splashed onto the door's control panel, causing it to explode. Mendez swore, but knew that somehow, that alien had been in the room and managed to open the door, which was a terrifying sign of intelligence.

Mendez quickly located his assault rifle, then started looking for ways in and out of the room. There was one air shaft in the roof, but he could neither get into it or seal it off, so he simply put a chair underneath it to give him an alarm if anything was coming. The only other thing he saw was a window, but it was intact. Mendez was considering shooting it out, then climbing through, but the chair he placed under the air duct suddenly broke. He spun, and saw exactly what he had feared. The aliens had come for him, and as he took aim at the first, more began to drop in. Mendez yelled wordlessly and fired. His rifle spit lead, the heavy rounds ripping into alien flesh, spraying the green blood all over the other ones...which unsurprisingly did nothing. Mendez picked another target, and put a burst into its chest area, causing it to stagger, then fall as another burst hit it in the head. He kept firing, and firing and firing, and the aliens kept coming and coming...and then he was dry. His hand moved on instinct to get a spare clip, but he knew he wouldn't make it. He slapped it in, and cycled the bolt just as an alien dove. Mendez looked up, saw the...

2. Chapter 1

Space was cold. Too cold for a Spartan, which was exactly why the Chief preferred fighting on the ground rather than in orbital or extra-orbital battles. But today, just this once, he was 100 percent sure that he'd much rather be in a nice, safe, heavy destroyer. He could deal with covenant, he could deal with the flood. But this...situation...was by far the most horrifying he'd ever encountered. He was not afraid, but he was nervous, and it took a lot to make the Chief nervous. Fortunately, the marines following him through the ruined complex couldn't see his face, or make out the tenseness in his rock like muscles. The last report regarding this highly remote medical research facility had come from a light cruiser in orbit that had discovered a crashed covenant ship, the occupants of which apparently had taken over the facility...but something killed them too. And when the marines were sent to secure the AI and scuttle the facility, something killed them too. This time, a much more serious response was sent in, a heavy destroyer, two cruisers,

and one corvette. There was no beacon from the surface, there was no signals, but there were life signs. All of them were like nothing either human or covenant scanners had ever recorded before.

But it didn't matter about the history of this disaster, because in the end, the planet would end up glassed. It always ended up that way when they sent the Spartans, the powered armor donning super soldiers were like plasma torpedo magnets. The chief almost thought of it as poetic justice when they rounded the corner and saw an elite, his body ripped in half and a half eaten plasma rifle near his body. His purple blood was everywhere on the walls, and his face was contorted into what even a human would recognize as a face of agony. The chief paused and inspected his wounds. "Heavy lacerations, bite marks...whatever killed this one decided to eat him afterwards." Cortana told the Chief. They kept moving. The closer they got to the control room, the more corpses of both covenant and marines they found, and the more brutal the injuries were. Hits from assault and battle rifles pockmarked the bulkheads, which shimmered dimly in the low lighting. Plasma burns and needler hits were soon spotted as well. It was twenty meters from the control room that they saw the first one. It was massive, black shiny carapace, nasty teeth, almost humanoid, but it looked like it was more of a quadruped than a bipedal organism. Either way, the Chief could only think of it as a monster, or maybe a demon. This particular one had been killed by an MA-5B assault rifle, but he also had a battle rifle wound. The chief felt a shiver go up his spine. He didn't like any of it.

"Jesus Christ, what kinda monster takes this much ammo before going down?" the marine behind him said, looking at the doors to the control room ahead, where shell casings from all sorts of weapons were everywhere. The chief tracked his gaze up, and zoomed in on the door. What he saw worried him even further, blood was sprayed across the door and its operating panel, and on the hard steel floor, but no bodies or parts of bodies were anywhere to be seen, and there were no drag marks of any kind. "Objective in sight", Cortana chimed in. "Station still has power, but the internal panel seems to be damaged, you'll have to kick it in Chief."

The Chief slung stepped up to the door, and two marines crouched behind him, taking aim dead ahead. "On three." the Chief ordered. He raised his hand, holding up three fingers. Dropped one. Dropped another, heard the marines cycle their rifle bolts. Dropped the last finger, and bringing his massive amplified strength into play, kick the door full force. It was torn out of the bulkhead and thrown across the entire control room, slamming against a control panel and causing it to explode. He spun around as soon as he had hit the door and took cover behind the wall. The marines held their fire, there was nothing there. "Go", the chief whispered, spinning around the shattered door frame and entering the room.

Even for a battle ravaged command center, it was in tatters. Consoles were smashed and some had exploded. A few seem to have been melted by something, but the Chief had no idea what they were up against, all the reports had been lost when the UNSC lost contact with the ships originally sent in. At the moment, he had a constant live video uplink to the heavy destroyer in orbit - Lightscream. The Chief again saw many spent shell casings, and even the rifle that had fired them. An older MA-5B rifle, completely out of ammo. Hundreds of shell casings were everywhere, but again, no bodies. "Must have been one hell of a battle, look at all the rounds...but where are all the

bodies?" one of the Marines mused to himself, thinking out loud. "It doesn't matter. Find the AI, secure it." the Chief ordered. The Marines split up, looking. It took only a minute to find it. The chief picked up the small disc and stuck it into a special slot on his helmet. He felt a chill run down his spine as the AI entered the MJOLINR armor's system. "Cortana, work your magic." he said. "Analyzing now", she responded. "Chief, this is bizarre. There is no personality within this AI, its just a computer system used to open doors and run scans and routine tasks like that. I thought it was supposed to be a star ship capable AI named 'Streak'?" she finished.

The Chief reviewed his briefing documents quickly. "It was. That means this is a plant to throw us off, or else there's another AI in the complex somewhere that we need to locate. Cortana, download anything useful from this AI, I'm going to destroy it. I've got a bad feeling about this, like it's a plant to throw us off." the Chief said. Cortana only hesitated an instant before giving him the go ahead. The Chief handed the small disc to the nearest marine. "Soldier, dispose of this." he said. The soldier nodded, and stamped on it with his foot. "Ah, Chief, found the main AI. Its in the sub levels below the complex...but there's something wrong, I can't seem to clear us a direct path there, something about emergency containment protocols. There is, however, a maintenance shaft that leads from a hanger bay on the south side of the complex down to an abandoned warehouse that appears to have been used during the construction of this complex. I'm marking it with a nav-point." she said. A small red blip appeared on the Chief's HUD. "Marines, follow me" he ordered quietly. They fell in, leaving the room quickly, growing more uneasy by the minute.

The elite roared in defiance as the creatures came again. His plasma rifle spewed streams of blue death, the burning plasma rounds incinerating black carapace, melting chunks of flesh, and vaporizing limbs. But there were far too many. The few grunts with him were firing nervously, plasma pistols spitting shots into the swarm of black that hammered at the lower barricades made out of pieces of the hull from the now ruined cruiser _Eye of Justice_. The creatures were horrible, even the flood were nowhere near as intimidating as the aliens they slew now. He had dealt with flood, he had dealt with humans. Both races had, at some point in time, given him a good scare with the viciousness of their fight, but nothing compared to these giant black serpents. His plasma rifle kept spitting blue fire, the shots punching into aliens and blowing them apart. A grunt with a needler fired his precious ammo at a well chosen target. The entire magazine connected with the creature, who was obviously oblivious to its function. Seconds later, a large explosion of pink and purple engulfed it and the others around it. But, as the Elite quickly learned, even in death, the creatures still managed to strike. Their blood was acidic, and every beast they killed sprayed its blood onto the barricades, which grew weaker by the day. They had been slowly retreating back through the ship, losing more and more soliders with each engagement.

However, it had quickly become apparent that the creatures were not just animals, they were quite intelligent, and had proven it by sneaking into the ship through maintenance shafts and sneaking up behind an entire platoon of Jackals, none of which survived. Fortunately, the Elites left to the ship managed to seal that bay and flood it with neuro-toxins. Whether anything survived, no one cared to

know. Until a drop ship or communication array was repaired, they would have to hold the ship. Most of the crew had died in the crash, an accident caused by two hunters who got into a disagreement, in the end turning their fuel-rod cannons on each other in the engine room. The detonation blew half the cruiser off, and sent the rest falling down to the planet's surface.

The lower barricade was beginning to buckle as a swarm of endless aliens came at it. The elite swore as his plasma rifle ran dry, and he tossed it backwards, where a grunt would catch it and run it off to be placed on a charger. The Elite drew his secondary weapon, a plasma pistol, and held down the firing stud. A large bolt of green plasma grew on the end as he overcharged it, then he watched it fly down towards the crowd. The shot was dead on, and the blast vaporized the creature, leaving only a cloud of its blood in the air. He felt the vibrations through the hull plating as the lower barricade began to give way, and heard so much as felt it snap. The aliens charged up to level two, and still the Elite and the grunts fired, hopelessly pouring plasma into an onrushing river of black carapace, a river of impending doom. The surviving covenant had made a small stronghold in a large cargo bay, completely sealed all possible entrances except one, which they would most likely soon be retreating through in a short amount of time. The upper barricade was a bit tougher, and the aliens slamming into were dazed. The elite took this moment in time to do big damage. His claws found a plasma grenade, and with a click, he ignited it, and tossed it into the crowd.

His aim was flawless, as it should have been, especially considering his black armor. The device attached itself to an alien's head area. The creature hissed in confusion, and began scratching at it, trying in vain to make it come off. Just as another alien approached him, it detonated in a cloud of blue flame. The creature that had the grenade attached to it was vaporized, the ones nearest it were killed by the explosion, and a few more were launched like missiles over the edge and down to the very bottom of the landing bay they were struggling to consume. The ones that fell died instantly as they hit the floor. Overall, an effective use of his second to last grenade. There were plenty of weapons in the cargo bay, but there was no time to go back for more. The elite kept on firing his plasma pistol, every shot finding the dull shine on the black carapace, melting into it, and vaporizing what was inside. Bodies piled high as the covenant fought on.

But just as the Elite thought it was going to be a full retreat into the cargo bay, help arrived in the form of a hunter. He charged out of the cargo bay, his fuel rod cannon glowing. He skidded to a halt, and fired. The blast punched into flesh, and blew the aliens into gory pieces, their blood spraying onto the deck, the bulkheads, and part of the barricades, all of which began to melt. That shot changed the battle, and the aliens began to retreat. Even as the charged away, the covenant kept firing, previously skittish grunts now shouting taunts as they fired into the alien backs. A few went down, but despite their massive size, they were extremely fast and agile. The battle was over. "Return to the stronghold, recharge your weapons." the Elite ordered. The grunts and hunter turned and started moving wearily back into the cargo bay. It was over for now, but soon they would attack again.

The elite entered the stronghold, and frustration boiled inside him. A few ghosts, one wraith, and the cannons from a banshee were all

forming a defensive line to the ship's commander, an Elite in Gold armor. He was brave, he was wise, but he was too lazy, and too self-centered to bother. He sent his warriors to die, and hadn't even so much as ignited his sword since the battle against the black beasts began. It angered the black Elite, who was called 'Phantom' by other warriors, that a commander could be so...ignorant to their circumstances. But he looked different as Phantom approached him. "Sir, the lower barricades are breeched, but we turned them away. The jackals are attempting to repair them now." he said simply. "They are frustrating, these creatures. But we have far more interesting news. According to what's left of our sensors, a human battle group is in orbit, and they have sent landing parties to the human complex we detected...but they also sent 'him'." the commander said.

Phantom blinked in surprise. The human's had only a few truly elite warriors, called them 'Spartans' apparently. However, Phantom believed 'Elite' was an understatement for these warriors. They were fearless, cunning, physically powerful, and impossibly fast. Super soldiers, as it were. Phantom made up his mind instantly. "Then the prophets demand that we slay these infidels. I shall go, and I shall meet this human in battle. Then, when I am done with him, I shall bring you his helmet!" Phantom boasted. The commander looked interested.

"A very bold statement. How might you plan to get past the creatures? Surely they are holding the forward levels of the ship?" he asked. Phantom moved to a crate, and opened it, revealing active camouflage cells. "I will do what I must to kill this human. And when I have his head, we will call his earth ships to us, and take them for our own use." he said, boasting again.

The commander nodded slowly, obviously believing that continuous battle with such hellish enemies had driven the black armored soldier insane. But, there was nothing to lose now. "Very well. Take what weapons you will, and go." he said simply. Phantom turned, collected two plasma rifles, a plasma pistol, and put a beam rifle into his claws before moving swiftly out of the room.

"Chief...I've got movements" someone shouted. The Chief turned to look at the marine and now it was too late when a beam rifle fired from thin air, and blew the soldier's face all over the nearest wall...

3. Chapter 3

-1Nowhere. The shot had come from nowhere. The Marines swore, and began spraying lead in random directions. The Chief however, knew exactly what was happening. He saw the familiar and still terrifying sheen of active camouflage. He merely pointed his weapon, and fired. The shot bounced off the elite's shields. Its armor was black, meaning it was a special operations elite rather than a stealth elite, which would have had a whitish, silvery armor. The Chief fired his rifle again and side stepped rapidly, as the marines picked up the trail of his bullets, and began to aim for the elite, who, realizing he was about to have over a hundred holes blown through his face, decided to move back into cover. The blip on his motion detector revealed that the elite was in rapid retreat. "Covenant. What the fuck are the covenant doing here?" a marine asked. The Chief shrugged. "It doesn't matter for the moment. We'll get the AI, and

then Lightscream will pulverize them from orbit." he said simply. A few marines snorted in amusement, reveling in the confidence that their commander had.

The Marines and the Chief continued their movement, down through various levels, where the carnage grew eerily less and less. Finally, they reached a bottom level where there was supposed to be a door at an end of a long hallway that would take them to central processing where Streak would be waiting for them. As soon as the Chief entered the hallway, he knew trouble was nearby, because the hallway was no longer a hallway, it was a cave of wrongness. The temperature had shot up several degrees, humidity had risen, and some kind of sticky growth was covering the walls. "What in the hell is this!?" one of the marines whispered to no one in particular. "Analysis complete. Its organic, like some sort of secretive resin." Cortana reported. One of the Marines swore quietly. "Yeah, but what the hell secreted it?" he asked. That brought several low whispers. The Chief shouldered his battle rifle, and stalked forward. "On me. One click down this corridor." he said, stalking forward silently. As they continued, the hallway became even more disfigured with alien biomass. It was everywhere. And soon they began to encounter some kind of white pod like things, burst open into four sections, as if something inside them had burst out, like it was an egg.

The movement continued until they were two hundred meters from the door. "Objective in visual range." Cortana stated. The Chief halted, and signaled quietly with his hand. He felt a definite wrongness, like something terrible had happened here, beyond the obvious infestation of those black alien creatures. The two marines he signaled approached the door, and one covered the other as they began to attempt to access its security lock. That was when things began to fall apart. A tiny red dot appeared on his motion tracker. "Movement." he reported, indicating the direction with his arm. The Marines instantly rearranged themselves to cover that direction. "Its coming straight at us!" Cortana reported, as additional contacts began to appear. Finally, a total of seven appeared, the exact same number as the Chief's party, marines included. The tension built quickly as the ten contacts advanced straight at them, until, eerily, the markers were labeled at zero meters. The Chief instantly recognized vertical mapping, and made signals to watch the roof and floor. But it was far too late; just as the marines began to shift their aim, some kind of creatures attacked. They were white, and seemed like a combination of a spider and a crawling hand. They had long tails, and leapt with impossible power for their size. The Chief knew danger when he saw it, and shouted the warning. "Marines, retreat!" he ordered. Before they could take aim though, the fight was over. Six marines emitted muffled screams of agony as the creatures assaulted their faces. One attempted to attack the Chief but repeatedly bounced off the Chief's shields. The second time it leapt, the Chief caught it with a backhand smash that splattered the creature.

Too his horror, it only worsened the situation. The blood of the alien splattered onto a nearby wall, which began to burn. Even the being's blood was a weapon! The Chief turned to see the marines still struggling with the aliens attached to their faces, their shouts of resistance heavily faded. He didn't even hesitate, and opened fire. His battle rifle spit a burst of hot lead into a soldier's throat. The creature instantly screeched, and detached itself, and leapt at the Chief, who trap-shot it in mid-leap. The

reaction cost him dearly. The bullets ripped into the creature and blew it apart, spraying its blood every which way possible. That included the blood landing onto the marines. The Chief watched in horror as the acid consumed them, stood their helpless as his fellow soldiers were consumed utterly, and for all his training, power, and intelligence, he could do nothing to save them. So the Master Chief did the only thing he could think of. He charged. His armor pounded against battered, melting deck plating as he shoulder tackled the door into the room where Streak would be. The heavy tackle sent the massive door toppling inwards. The room was only small, surprisingly, with a single console that was some kind of control device. The Chief wasted no time in unlinking Cortana to the console. "Download in progress." she said. The Chief assumed that the download would be rapid, but in all actuality, it took hours. Many hours. He lost track almost completely of the time, until suddenly, he heard groans. He rushed into the corridor to see the white face hugging aliens dead, on the floor, and marines groaning as they got up in pain. "Cortana" he asked. "Scanning, standby" Chief. Something isn't right. I can't really tell what it is, but its just" wrong." she said. The Chief muttered slightly, but moved to assist marines.

"Download complete." Cortana announced. "Man, Chief, what the hell happened to us?" one of the marines asked as he stretched. "Right now that's not important. We need to get this AI out of this area and back to _Lightscream_. Once onboard the doctors will give you all treatment if you require it along with some R and R." he said bluntly. The marines seemed satisfied, so they moved out. It only took minutes for the carnage to resume again. One marine paused, and put a hand to his chest as if in pain. Then another one" and another" and the next thing the Chief knew, all the marines were in convulsions, screaming in agony. The Chief was frozen, unsure of what to do. Combat training told him he should assist in any way he could, but how? Whatever those things were, they had poisoned his marines, and that poison was probably killing them. He held onto that thought until he heard the bones beginning to snap. The Chief dove forward and ripped off the armor plate of the nearest marine, and was instantly splattered with blood. He stumbled backwards out of instinct, and for the first time ever, terror began to grip the chief's bones as the marine twitched and yelled in agony. Slowly, the spray of broken bone fragments slowed, until _something_ emerged from the marine's body. The Chief, on his backside, quickly leapt up as the creature darted away into a tiny vent. The Chief swore. Things just got complicated.

The watcher had witnessed the prey's prowess and agility. It was perhaps even worthy enough to do battle with one such as him! He had observed how he moved, how he dealt with things, how strong he was and how fast he was. For a human, he was incredible, though the watcher thought it might have something to do with the suit of armor he wore. Regardless, he was worthy, and if the watcher didn't complete his mission, he would be finished anyway. Silently, he dropped from the ceiling, and began to follow the man in the green armor.

End
file.